

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVIII—No. 18

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

ONE OF THE MOST CURIOUS, and to critically-minded people, disquieting, features of the present era, is the apparently ubiquitous revival of ancient delusions and superstitions which the scientific progress of recent centuries appeared to have buried for good. Conspicuous amongst such "survivals and new arrivals" is the ancient cult of astrology—a cult of immemorial antiquity—perhaps, indeed, the oldest of all, which in the hands of modern advertising and the mass production of popular newspapers, has taken on quite a New Look. The spectacle of the ancient Chaldean or Egyptian soothsayers duly drafting their weekly column on "What the Stars Foretell" is surely a fit subject for a modern satiric pen.

For while the more sceptical 18th and 19th centuries consigned such predictions to the waste paper basket, today hardly a profit-seeking journal appears to exist which does not run an astrology column.

Office Boy Writers and Readers

"Written and read by office boys" was the dictum expressed by that intelligent and cynical old Tory aristocrat, Lord Salisbury. That eminent Victorian is supposed to have made this notable observation when he read the first issue of the *Daily Mail*. Alfred Harmsworth's pioneer journal primarily intended not to instruct, but to sell to the masses of people taught to read and write by the Victorian Education Acts but totally untrained to think. In due course, the *Daily Mail* was succeeded by even bigger and better popular journals, with even bigger and better circulations, culminating in the *News of the World*. The often startling "News" contained in it has now become part of the regular make-up of what Continentals ironically term "the English Sunday"—which originally connoted a Puritanical outlook not conspicuous in our Sunday contemporary.

The modern cult of astrology seems to have arrived with the successive appearances and the current phenomenal circulation of this class of popular journal. Actually, I do not consider that it is really accurate to talk about the present growth of such superstitions; probably such superstitions were always there, even in, probably, the spacious and rationalistic days of Queen Victoria. But in the pre-democratic and pre-industrial age when the masses were still largely illiterate, such delusions remained inarticulate and did not occupy the attention of the educated classes. Nowadays, with the still superficial education of the adolescent masses, these subterranean superstitions have risen to the surface and have become articulate.

What the Stars Foretell

In a recent article the *Daily Express*, which runs, I believe, a fairly close second in circulation to its weekly contemporary the *News of the World* (and which also runs its star-gazing column—this time under the rather cynical title of "Lord Luck"!) gave some significant figures on the vogue of current astrological cults. I quote some terrestrial statistics—in which I have considerably more confidence

than in its star-gazing predictions. It does not give statistics regarding the number of "confirmed addicts" of the cult, though these must be high in these "Christian" islands; but it gives an impressive list, among whom "stars" in show-business figure prominently. As might be expected, for surely "star calleth unto star." On a rather more serious level I learn with some surprise that among the more serious students of astrology is Sir Compton Mackenzie, who is even a qualified practitioner (I always thought that he was a Roman Catholic).

However, Great Britain—to judge from subsequent figures in the article—is only an outpost in the world of astrology. Indeed, it is melancholy news that,

amongst the fifty millions of British citizens there are only in all about a score or so of full-time professional astrologers. Judging from their vast clientele, they must work overtime, untroubled by Trade Union restrictions! (Is there an Astrologers' Union affiliated to the T.U.C. and, if so, what is the recognised rate for the job?)

Astonishing Statistics

Some astonishing statistics follow. In Western (Federal) Germany, which used to be regarded as the land *par excellence* of science, "a survey showed that 22,500,000 people [nearly half the population] read their horoscopes in newspapers and magazines; 15,500,000 believe that their future is written in the stars; and 8,500,000 actually shape their lives according to what the stars tell them." (So did their former Fuhrer Adolf Hitler!)

As might be expected, the main strongholds of astrology are still in the "immemorial East," where the royal art probably began. "In Burma, in 1952, the Government resigned for five minutes because the stars were not propitious at the time. . . . But India leads. There they have university degrees in astrology and it takes 12 years of study to get a degree. Then another nine years of apprenticeship before you can set up on your own." (Meanwhile you presumably live *on*, as well as *by*, the stars!) In view of such figures, ought one not to reconsider the glib statement that ours is a scientific age?

An Age of Fear

Not only are the above facts and figures disquieting in themselves; they possess a serious, even a menacing social significance. For astrology, like religion, has always flourished most in ages of fear, ages of social tension and insecurity. Hitherto the golden ages of astrology were the Fall of the Roman Empire and of the Reformation, both ages of fear and of social disruption. Our own age is an age of fear. Banish the fear and the stars will again become merely geophysical objects. Meanwhile the world will remain full of anxious people, devoid of scientific training, who put their last hope in their lucky stars. And in an age of shameless profit-making like ours, newspaper proprietors, avid for increased circulations at all costs, will also thank their *lucky* stars for this (literally) heaven-sent opportunity.

VIEWS and OPINIONS

What the Stars Foretell

By F. A. RIDLEY

Our Dreams

By G. H. TAYLOR

IT IS NOT SURPRISING that an acceptable analysis of the origin and nature of dreaming has so far eluded the psychologist. Unlike other scientific investigations, the initial method of inquiry has to be introspective. It is only by pooling the private evidence that any objective discoveries can be made.

As for actually measuring the physical effects accompanying a dream, this could presumably be done only by the electroencephalograph. I have not heard of it being done successfully, and some difficulty might be presented in inducing the subject to sleep peacefully with a dozen electrodes fitted to the head.

So far as the issue of Materialism is concerned, it is enough to know that, although there is much to find out, the supernatural explanation of dreams is now only of anthropological interest. The theory of the wandering soul was demolished as long ago as Cicero.

It will probably be accepted that dreams are hallucinations, mainly visual, in sleep; but this is a description and not an explanation. There are theorists who maintain that, normally, everyone dreams every night, whether the dream is remembered or not. Most of us would aver that we *had* dreamt on occasions, even though we cannot recall a single detail.

Before the advent of 20th century psychology speculations about dreaming were made by philosophers rather than by men of science. None the less, their hazards are of some interest. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), in his *Leviathan*, speaks of "the agitation of the inward parts of a man's body," giving disturbances which keep the brain in action. Contemporary with him, and sharing with Hobbes and Bacon the marking of a new epoch in Philosophy, the French metaphysician, René Descartes (1596-1650), held a dream theory consonant with his famous premise, "I think. Therefore I am." To cease thinking would be to cease existing! Therefore dreaming was an essential activity of the Thinker during sleep (vide *Meditations*). This drew a protest from John Locke, who did not accept that "to sleep is to dream."

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), the German philosopher (half English by birth), also started his explanation of dreams from "impressions received from the internal regions of the organism through the sympathetic nervous system," these being worked up by the mind into quasi-realities in space and time.

The little-known Scottish philosopher Stewart (1753-1826) separates the "mind" from its "faculties." In sleep it loses its hold on them and dreams are the result. (*Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*.) A similar theory came to be held by Scherner, writing in 1861 (*Das Leben des Traumes*). He regarded the dream as a decentralisation, the ego losing its grip.

Among the precursors of modern thought were probably Maine de Biran (writing in 1792) and Alfred Maury (1853 and '78). It became the fashion to regard the dreamer as a kind of passive spectator incapable of controlling the flux of events. Suspension of the will meant that the dreamer was easily imposed upon (vide A. Maury, *Le Sommeil* and *Les Rêves*).

Delbœuff (1885) sought to explain the dream as a continuation of waking thought, and this was near to the position taken later by Henri Bergson (1859-1924), the French Vitalist philosopher. In sleep the *élan vital* would continue its now subdued agitation and revive old memories from

an obscure past (*Dreams*). This is a theory which, like that of Descartes', stands or falls with the main philosophy itself, and in both cases the main philosophy has been rendered obsolete on other grounds. Bergson did, however, point to one feature which has met with some general acceptance; namely, that a dream can display a marked degree of logical sequence.

The German philosopher and psychologist, Wundt (1832-1921), incidentally the first to start a psychological laboratory, saw the dream as a state of "normal temporary insanity," with somnambulism a further step in the direction of actual insanity.

With the coming of the school of Psychoanalysis, the factor of sex began to play a greater, even a dominant, part in explaining dreams, which for Freud (1856-1939) were largely the expression of desires not approved by "the Censor."

Now it is difficult to believe that dogs have a Moral Censor, yet few dog-owners would doubt that their dogs have dreams. Both Jastrow and Archer regard Freud as too sweeping, and it was the former who made the well-known remark that "Psychoanalysis is a great discovery made by the wrong man." It is only fair to note, however, that the opposite view has its adherents; namely, that although psychoanalysis is of meagre value, the only good in it is in Freud and not in the charlatans who have succeeded him and practised in his name and fame.

His immediate disciple, Adler (1870-1937) found in his clinic many patients who, through bodily defects, yearned for compensation and developed nervous disturbances (neuroses). The desire for superiority, the "power motive," became the basis of Adler's theorising. Instead of seeking the dream's origin, he maintained, we should seek its goal. Its goal is power and the dreamer is seeking guidance to that end.

For William Archer the dream is no more than a "mental maelstrom"; this view, incidentally, was shared by D. H. Lawrence. Perhaps this would accommodate the theory that there is no single definable cause of dreaming but that various factors may be in operation.

Possibly some nocturnal sound may result in a half-awakening, auditory sensations suggesting a visual image and thence a combination of successive related events. But however the problem is finally resolved, the religious or supernatural account is a non-starter.

SCHOOLBOY HOWLERS

Polygamy is having several wives. Monotony is having only one.

An epistle is an apostle's brother.

A parable is a heavenly story with no earthly meaning.

A ghost does not exist and is seen in the dark.

The Vacuum is where the Pope's speeches come from.

Socrates was an ancient scholar who died from an overdose of wedlock.

Elocution is a method of killing people used by American politicians.

A missionary teaches cannibals to love Christians, especially fat ones.

The motto of Democracy is "Liberty, Equality, Maternity."

—NEXT WEEK—

LOURDES AS I KNOW IT

By DR. J. V. DUHIG

My Years as a Monk

By O. C. DREWITT (EX-FATHER NORBERT, O.P.)
(Continued from page 135)

MONKS, however, believe that sensuous pleasure can disturb contemplation, which is an escape from the material to the spiritual. The sensuous should be employed only in moderation as an imperfect vehicle of the immaterial. The attitude is logical, given the assumptions of religious life. Less consistent are the meretricious forms of art and music, and the exploitation of abnormal psychological processes to generate feelings of "devotion," encouraged in the name of piety. Psychoanalytically, their enjoyment means a breaking-through of unrecognised sexuality from the unconscious, with resulting attachment to objects of a revolting silliness. It should be added in fairness that some of the mystics, like Teresa of Avila, have been afraid of this "devotion" and its strange physical accompaniments, but the Catholic Church as a whole has never taken much notice of them. Competitive commercial interests, on the other hand, are involved, and maybe we shall get bigger and better idols when automation takes over.

The monastic time-table varies a little in different convents, but the novitiate day is the prototype of the full Dominican life everywhere. A Dominican is primarily a contemplative. His preaching and writing are intended to be the overflow of contemplation, of what he discovers in silent study and prayer. Practical action is to arise *ex abundantia contemplationis*, "out of the abundance of contemplation." Consequently, prayer and contemplation occupy a great part of the Dominican day. In addition to the silent meditative prayer, there are the long recited prayers in church.

We rose in the novitiate at about 5.30. The first duty was going to the church for Prime.¹ Prime is part of the Office—the Liturgy of the Breviary or solemn official prayer of the Catholic Church, excluding the Mass. The Office is divided into seven parts: Matins and Lauds in the evening or sometimes at midnight; and Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline. To the layman they are all rather similar, and not unlike the Anglican Morning and Evening Prayer. They are composed of psalms, responses, prayers and hymns, all in Latin. Prime is the part the monks recite on getting up. It is recited on a monotone, most of it alternately by the two sides of the choir, or "choir against choir": *chorus contra chorum*. Considering the hour of day, it generally sounds lively, for it is the rule, when you are called, to leap from your bed shouting "Thanks be to God." *Deo gratias*, in joyous tones. The monk whose duty it is to be caller goes round with a hammer, hitting the doors and crying *Benedicamus Domino*, "Let us bless the Lord," at each cell. When it was my duty, the joyous reply, particularly in winter, varied from muffled misery to sarcasm. Still, by the time all were in church most of us were awake.

After Prime came the first Mass, at which the novices and lay-brothers received Communion. The fathers normally celebrate their own Masses, of which Communion is an integral part. If they have committed a mortal sin, they cannot do so, unless they have gone to Confession and received absolution. Nor can anybody else who is in a state of mortal sin receive Communion. There are many kinds of mortal sin, including thoughts, intentions, doubts concerning matters of faith, or reading forbidden books.

¹The account of what goes on in church has been curtailed, particularly with reference to the complicated ritual, and qualifications have been omitted where only pedantry would be served by including them.

They involve damnation if death comes and they are unforgiven. Communion, therefore, is not an enterprise to be approached with levity of mind, for, if you go to Communion in a state of mortal sin, you commit another mortal sin. All of which has to be weighed up at 5.30 in the morning.

The early Mass is accompanied by silent meditation, and the novices do not take part in the Mass itself. The church is therefore in silence. The air may be cold, the body of the church dim, two candles lit on the altar, the monks kneeling motionless in their white habits and black, full cloaks or coppas.

The Latin words of the Mass are pronounced quietly by the celebrant. The only clear sound is at the consecration, when the brass sanctus bell rings and the priest lifts the consecrated wafer and the silver chalice, having said the words *Hoc est corpus meum* over the bread, and *Hic est calix sanguinis meæ* over the wine, thus separating mystically the body and blood of Christ. This is the transubstantiation mystery, the sacrifice of the Mass, in which the substances of the bread and wine are changed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. The rite is the heart of the Christian world. Much of the painting and sculpture and the architecture of two thousand years has been concerned with it: Byzantium, Ravenna, Donatello and El Greco, in our time Henri Matisse and Salvador Dali. Pagan, mystical, but at any rate more seductive than the religions of Billy Graham or the Archbishop of Canterbury. The liturgical symbolism of the Catholic Church is like a fossil from the Middle Ages. It is a vestige of feudalism, and less obviously inhuman than bourgeois religions. It has the beauty of an ideal, and if later experience uncovered the reverse of the ideal, the concealed brutality was not evident at the time.

It should be added that, given the assumptions of Catholic Aristotelian philosophy, the doctrine of transubstantiation is coherent. Scientific humanists have sometimes made themselves ridiculous, and thereby enfeebled the attack on religion, by offering, for example, to analyse a consecrated wafer chemically. No one should write on the subject without having read the *Summa Theologica*, Third Part, *De Sacramentis*. They are otherwise liable to invent arguments on a level with the assertion that even with electron micrographs biologists have never seen God.

There was, however, one feature that from the beginning seemed uninspired and to suggest that even pleasurable aspects of Catholic worship derived their influence from something psychologically abnormal.

This was the prohibition to take anything through the mouth before Communion, and the obligation to swallow the Communion wafer whole. It must not be bitten, and no crumb should be allowed to drop on the floor of the church or on the Communion rail. The communicants held a white cloth under their chins to prevent this, and also passed an oval brass dish from one to another, to be held under the chin for the same purpose. There was a double safeguard. Further, the end part of the Mass is largely concerned with the cleaning of such articles, so that no speck of consecrated bread is left. Unlike the main ritual of the Mass, all this cleaning, scraping and washing appeared full of scrupulosity, and ugly. It suggested neurotic anxiety and guilt.

(To be continued)

This Believing World

While it would be quite impossible to get a letter ridiculing the sacred story of Jonah and the whale in the *Radio Times*, it is the easiest thing in the world to get one in bolstering it up. A Mr. R. C. Paget informs the millions of readers of this journal that there is a "well-authenticated case" of a whale swallowing a man. He was James Bartley of the whaling ship *Star of the East*, and he "was released" alive the day after during the carve-up of the whale after it was killed. We are even given the date—1891. And a bigger lie was never invented. There is not a scrap of evidence that James Bartley or the ship *Star of the East* ever existed. No one has ever discovered any trace of them anywhere. We invite Mr. Paget or the *Radio Times* to give us any contemporary evidence of this silly tale for the marines.

★

The announcement of the forthcoming marriage between Miss Frances Sweeny and the Duke of Rutland brings into conflict the power of the Church of Rome bolstering up in England an alien religion administered from Italy, and the actual law of this country. Miss Sweeny is a Catholic, the Duke is a Protestant, and the only marriage in England which is legal is the civil ceremony in a register office or before an appointed registrar. Miss Sweeny and the Duke are going to be married in an ordinary register office—and the Church of Rome has immediately broadcast that the marriage will not be recognised by the Catholic Church! We can only hope that they will ignore the consummate impudence of this Roman Church with its out-of-date laws pretending to a power it has not got now—at least, not in England.

★

The town of Bolton seems to have a particularly unhappy bunch of Christians judging from some of the letters published in the *Evening Sentinel*—though we must congratulate its Editor on not being afraid to publish letters from convinced unbelievers. One question recently discussed in its columns was whether Jesus was "harsh"? The people who never cease talking about "gentle" Jesus appear never to have read their Testament, for no one condemned people disagreeing with him more ferociously. Eternal hell fire for unbelievers was his favourite punishment, and Jesus was, in addition, a devout believer in self-mutilation. Any Bible lover could give the exact quotations.

★

That famous broadcaster, Sir Mortimer Wheeler, recently gave the anti-evolutionists a contemptuous rebuff when he said that "the principle of evolution is beyond dispute and anyone who denies it must be foolish." He ridiculed those illiterate Christians who defended their God by saying that Evolutionists maintained that man was descended from monkeys, and of course, admitted, as do all Evolutionists, that there were "thousands of missing links." But if Evolution is true—what becomes of "true" Christianity?

★

In the "Sunday Graphic" the Rev. F. Martin asks "Why in the modern vicarage has the number of children been severely cut to two or three?" And he answers his own question, "Without waiting for encouragement from their leaders, clergy have quietly adopted birth control, which is contrary to the official teaching of the Church"—an answer which shows that the hated Malthusian, the despised Neo-Malthusian, the unashamed "family planner" who, in the past, was more severely attacked by the Churches than by anybody else, were all right and the Churches wrong. And it was Freethinkers who bore the

brunt of the savage Christian persecution aimed at birth control—it was they who had to pay monstrous fines or go to prison. As Jesus never married, no doubt one day we shall be told that he was the Greatest Birth Controller who ever lived.

★

To show its impartiality, ITV staged a discussion between a Mr. A. Davies, of Birmingham, and the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead, of the City Temple. Mr. Davies was billed as an "unbeliever," and he certainly was—but of the very reverent type. Mr. Weatherhead had small difficulty in weathering some of the questions Mr. Davies posed and indeed was ready to agree with some of the objections stated. But Mr. Davies never questioned the story of Jesus in the least. Jesus said what he is said to have said, and the only difficulty was whether "our Lord" had got it quite right. It was a tepid discussion and left everyone exactly where they were before.

From Cuba

MY CORRESPONDENT IN CUBA, for diplomacy's sake, must remain anonymous, but is an enthusiastic supporter of our freethought cause.

One must remember when considering politico-social affairs in the Latin-American countries, that most of their constitutions are liberal and democratic, but, in practice, these republics are often the prey of dictators or authoritarian political groups who achieve power by revolutionary methods and then line their pockets freely by financial manipulations and legerdemain while "governing the country democratically for the benefit of the people." This continues until, perhaps years later, they are themselves overthrown by another revolution (which happened recently to Colombian and Venezuelan dictators) and the whole process begins again—a political "Perpetuum Mobile" in which the "fiddle" customarily takes the lead.

During their reign the dictators seek the support of powerful associations such as the workers' organisations—and the Roman Catholic Church.

In Cuba, Church and State are separated—legally—but actually work hand-in-glove to further their respective (and often mutual) interests. When a disagreement comes the Church usually proves the stronger and causes the fall of the dictator. In the ensuing political reshuffle intellectual, if not physical, genuflexion is a primary qualification for governmental candidates.

My correspondent states that women form approximately 80% of the regular churchgoers, most of the men being "indifferentists" and usually extremely tolerant. The Press also is tolerant, but, no doubt feeling that discretion is the better part of valour, it pays "lip-service" by publishing a "religious section" daily. Newspaper opposition to the Church would lead to a hierarchy-led boycott being proclaimed from the pulpit—which would have a catastrophic effect on circulation figures.

Our observer points out that his rationalism must of necessity be a personal thing, that local conditions forbid him from proselytising activity, or even speaking his mind to friends. This must be the case, he believes, with many individuals the world over. But in order to "compensate for his lack of militancy," he is a generous contributor to the world freethought movement in several directions.

We salute this "Unknown Soldier" of the freethought army—a typical representative of vast battalions.

D. SHIPPER.

THE FREETHINKER

41 GRAY'S INN ROAD, LONDON, W.C.1.

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All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 10s. (in U.S.A., \$4.25); half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

FRANK A. WATSON.—Glad to hear you took a firm line and insisted on affirming.

W. MILLS.—See *Bible Romances* by G. W. Foote for evidence that the Bible is full of legends and myths.

"HOPEFUL."—Please send the evidence for Reincarnation which you speak of.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, May 4th, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "Christianity and Commerce." (Centenary—Livingstone's Zambesi Expedition.)

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

London (Tower Hill).—Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and WOOD.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: T. H. MOSLEY.

West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, A. ARTHUR and J. W. BARKER.

Notes and News

LEICESTER Secular Society is the oldest society of its kind in the world, having been established in 1851. Its history is a proud and stirring one, but the Society has never been content to rest on its laurels. Indeed, perhaps its most notable virtue has been an ability to move with the times: continually to add to its fine tradition. And we know that it will do so under its new Secretary, Mr. C. H. Hammersley. Mr. Hammersley is well known to readers of THE FREETHINKER and to readers of Midland newspapers to which he writes many letters. "Supernaturalism"—he said in a recent one—"is based on beliefs (what you don't know) and never on tangible facts (what you do know). We have only one body (at least I have) and . . . death is the end of the physical and mental processes of that body." Meanwhile—fortunately for Leicester and for Secularism generally—Mr. Hammersley's "physical and mental processes" are most active.

We confess to pleasant surprise on opening *The Sentinel*, magazine of St. Stephen's Parish Church, Tonbridge, Kent, for the month of April. It contains an article, "Why I am an Agnostic," by Bill Owen, the well-known stage, screen and TV star, complete with portrait. True, a religious writer, "Watchman," technically "replies" to Mr. Owen,

CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES

to our oldest National Secular Society member,

ELIZA JANE PERRETT

President of Honour of the Portsmouth Branch,
on reaching her hundredth birthday on Thursday,
April 24th, 1958.

but his effort is not worth wasting time on. Mr. Owen's article, by contrast, is extremely good. As an actor, he says, he spends most of his time in a world of make-believe, and this makes him seek "reality" in his personal, unprofessional life. And the God of the Christian religion has "no more reality" for him than "the good fairy in pantomime." To mankind, in danger of being destroyed by the H-bomb, God is "about as relevant as the man in the moon."

★

If anyone tells Mr. Owen that nuclear warfare doesn't matter because "by God's grace, we are all immortal, then it follows that Belsen didn't matter, that wars don't matter, that evil is of no consequence. . . ." How can he accept the Christian God as the source of all goodness and love when the Church tells him God was fighting on our side in the last two wars? Christian clergymen should be crying out: "This is evil. All war is evil. The bomb—all bombs—must be banned." Of course, like all Freethinkers, Mr. Owen has often been told that he is a Christian without knowing it. He will have no nonsense like that. As far as he is concerned—he says—"they might just as well label me a sun-worshipper, like my pagan ancestors were." If every bishop had stood up in his cathedral on Easter Day, denounced the H-bomb and declared that Britain should pledge never to go to war again, then and only then, says Mr. Owen, "could I begin to believe that God makes sense."

★

MR. JEHOIADA DAVIES, of Porthcawl, South Wales, veteran and respected member of the National Secular Society, must have a virtually inexhaustible fund of stories. He has travelled widely in the old and new worlds—and visited Mecca. But his own particular Mecca was Ingersoll's home in America. There, says Mr. Davies's son, we met Ingersoll's granddaughter, who was interested in finding out how much of Ingersoll we really knew. "My father said he had read everything Ingersoll ever wrote and could repeat lots of it from memory." When asked what he thought was the finest essay, he said "The Liberty of Man, Woman and Child." "He then rose from his chair, walked to the fireplace, lit his pipe, and recited the whole essay." Ingersoll's granddaughter was understandably amazed, but she afterwards said that where Mr. Davies had stood then, some of the most famous men in the world had stood and spoken of her grandfather, but she was sure no man ever had the feeling for Ingersoll that Mr. Davies had. How fitting, then, that Mr. Davies's son should be named Robert Ingersoll Davies!

★

THIS year, as last, a number of cinemas invited a clergyman to speak to their audiences on Good Friday. Mr. W. G. Wilkinson, of Eastbourne, was one of those who protested. Writing to the local *Gazette* (April 16th, 1958), he contrasted the burden of expense of cinemas and theatres with the many rate allowances, etc., of churches, chapels and other religious establishments. Censorship, too, he noted, was rigorous in the case of the former, non-existent in the latter. But above all he resented the "interference with the right of British people to spend their leisure decently, rationally, and legally."

The World of Secularism To-day

By G. I. BENNETT

SOME HUNDRED YEARS AGO, thanks to the inspired labours of that working-class Englishman G. J. Holyoake, to whom Joseph McCabe in his *Life and Letters of G. J. Holyoake* paid a two-volume tribute, the Secularist Movement was born.

A reformer of sterling calibre, Holyoake in a life of crowded activity, in the course of which he went to prison for blasphemy, campaigned in many causes. He fought for a free press, for the education of working people, for the rights of woman, for the liberty of oppressed nationalities, for peace through arbitration among the nations. He was in the best sense a man of this world and saw—none better—the great social and ethical implications of discarding religious belief. To work for a better world here and now because it is the only world of which we have any knowledge seemed to Holyoake, as it has seemed to many others since his time, the morally right and good course for all dogma-free men to take; and when he set out to mobilise opinion in favour of much-needed reforms it was to them he appealed. He founded, or was instrumental in founding, societies of freethinkers that would lead the attack on the social evils of his day. This should be the work of Secularism (he coined the name), and these groups of socially-conscious freethinkers were to become known as Secular Societies. I do not think he could have found a more appropriate name; and well does *Chambers's Dictionary* define a Secularist as "one who, discarding religious belief and worship, applies himself exclusively to the things of this life." That is what the Secularist was at the outset, and that is what he is essentially today.

In the hundred years that the Secularist Movement has been in existence kaleidoscopic changes have taken place and many of the problems facing us today are of quite different character from those with which the early Secularists grappled. But our attitude to the world at large, is it not fundamentally the same as that of Holyoake and his co-operators? The question, What are we to do with our lives?—the theme of several of H. G. Wells's books and the actual title of one of them—confronts us as insistently today as ever in the past. For freethinkers it is a question of peculiar urgency and significance.

It has been argued, with superficial plausibility, that a man who lives out his days in the conviction that when he dies it is the end of everything has good reason or, at any rate, strong temptation to be shamelessly selfish and unprincipled, to yield without scruple to every gross passion of his being, because, on his view, he won't be called upon to answer for his wrongdoing hereafter. But people who argue thus overlook the fact—for fact it is—that in the last resort the conduct of even a staunch believer in the future life is, without his realising it, governed far more by his deep-rooted sociality, by his environmentally-conditioned consciousness of right and wrong, than by the tenets and affirmations of his religion.

In some cases an unhappy awareness of having acted shabbily or dishonourably will, unaccountably it almost seems, plague a man when the soullessly worldly are congratulating him on pulling off a smart stroke. But the moral disapproval of the generality of one's fellows is a force almost as powerful as the old tribal taboos and can make a man not notably sensitive feel his unworthiness. We know, however, that the everyday standards of the world are often at variance with the best that a person has in him to be and it should be the mark of a freethinker

that he endeavours to live up to the highest that his own enlightened point of view enables him to perceive. In our hidebound society there is at best a kind of grudging recognition that the freethinker may be as good a fellow as his religious conformist neighbour, and the attitude summed up in the remark, "Well, of course, he's an atheist. What can you expect?" too easily asserts itself.

Actually, if what Holyoake and his supporters believed is sound, as many of us think, there is no reason why much should not be expected of an atheist. It is true that he feels himself to be the arbiter of his own conduct, answerable in many things to none except himself. But it is also true that his concern for the affairs of this world is not diminished by anticipation of another and better world to come. For it has always seemed to me that, in so far as a believer in a life hereafter throws himself into activities aimed at improving conditions of life in this world he commits himself to a contradiction. This appears to me true even when a man, by engaging in social welfare work, seeks to prove himself a worthy candidate for heaven. For how, in an impermanent world, where all is relative and as shifting sand, can he have much enthusiasm for the job—if he really believes in the permanent and absolute? Assuming that so stupendous a conception as heaven is a reality, then what happens here and now is necessarily of secondary or subsidiary importance. We should live the quietest, most unfretful of lives terrestrially awaiting only the day of our departure.

But the spirit of resignation that faith in a future life properly entails, excellent perhaps as a personal moral discipline, is evil when extended beyond oneself to the world at large. That this life is important, and imposes upon us moral and social obligations from which we cannot cut ourselves loose, is clearly discerned by those dogma-free men and women who are Secularists pledged to advance the cause of what is true, right, and good. For Secularism, by its insistence upon our immediate, present duties towards, not our rights over, our fellow-men—and, I would add, our fellow-creatures—is at the opposite end of the scale to clericalism, which sometimes manifests astonishing insouciance about what happens here and now. And if freethought in its narrow specific sense is true (as I believe it is), then Secularism is true also. It is the positive, constructive, socially- and ethically-oriented face of freethought. It is the conscience of freethought and, like freethought, is an endeavour to see all things in the light of truth and as they are—not wrapped up in hallowed tradition and sonorous phrases.

Consider one such phrase, as pleasing to the ear as it is familiar—the Kingdom of Heaven. We smile, we who are disenchanted. We know it is a vision that has supported many an oppressed or sorrow-stricken soul. But an astral realm of timeless joy—it is to us a pathetic, even if poetic, illusion. It is an empty hope, a seductive vista of hollow promise. The phrase has no meaning except as it is metaphorically interpreted.

The Kingdom of Heaven is within you, it has been said; and we know, even if we do not experience it ourselves, that supreme inner happiness, which suffuses the lives of some few often simple and obscure men, is, however blessed it may be, a quality essentially of this world. The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth (to carry further our use of biblical phraseology) has metaphorically a wider, deeper meaning, for it relates, not to a state of happiness within

a single human being, but to the creation of such conditions in the outer material world as make for the well-being and happiness of all—or, since this is impossible, shall we not say, of the greatest number of human beings? This grand conception has never ceased to stir the minds, fire the imaginations, and raise the aspirations of men. Of course, it is idealism—idealism that lyrically reaches for the stars. One has only to look at the world today to realise that.

Men and women still die of hunger and endure the cruellest indignities and sharpest pains of poverty. Children are still born destined to see none of the sunshine of the world—only its murky alleys and hopeless back streets. Unemployment or fear of it, even in relatively prosperous communities, still drives many into unhealthy, uncongenial, soul-deadening jobs. Selfishness still leads men to exploit their fellows in various ways. Riches, which confer upon their possessors power over others, still dictate the tune to which the poor man must dance (especially in the industrial relationship of employer and employed); and in nearly every part of the world distinctions of class, and privileges of status, are still preserved with almost feudal zeal. Nations still stockpile armaments—the ghastliest ever—and make ready for war with all its inexpressible vileness and bottomless iniquity. And the men in control, from Cabinet ministers to press journalists, from military strategists to rank-and-file politicians, still think and talk in terms of the balance of power, military alliances, and the creation of ever more formidable military bases, as though it were all part of an inevitable but exciting game in which the lives and labours of millions of good peaceable folk mattered not at all.

Then look at man's treatment of animals. The wild creature still moans through bitter nights of suffering in the steel trap set by money-seeking traders, dead in heart and conscience, who fatten and flourish out of satisfying the passion of silly women to wear furs. The poor stag, his last race with hell run and his lungs bursting, is still torn shrieking limb from limb by a pack of hounds for the amusement of a handful of depraved men and women. Vivisection is still widely—nay, increasingly—practised, although it is of dubious utility and ethically objectionable. And there flourishes still the slaughter-house, casting its silent but grim shadow over the fair face of even the sunniest land. . . .

And so we could go on, adding to the dismal catalogue. How in such a world can we speak of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth? It will never be established, anyway. Pain and cruelty, injustice and wrong, are too universal and ineradicable for that. But it is an ideal to keep before us, to chasten us in our moments of complacency, to spur us to continued efforts in the cause of reason against unreason, right against might, honour against dishonour, goodness against evil.

Was there ever a time when the vigorous activities of a fearless and cant-free Secularism were more urgently needed than today? Its work does not end with laying religious authoritarianism by the heel. That is simply the beginning. Those of us who are Secularists want to make the world a better place for all to live in, to get rid of as much of its ugliness as we can, to labour for a sunnier future, to help pave the way to a more basically decent, more humane civilisation.

And so our fundamental work, as I conceive it, is to diminish in every practicable way the suffering and unhappiness and frustration we find in the world. Diminish, I say, not eliminate. Clearly, we can no more eliminate entirely suffering, unhappiness, and frustration than we can stop the mighty Niagara. But we can and must make the

attempt to reduce them to the best of our abilities, individual and corporate. Not to do so is surely to fail in the work of Secularism, which, in upholding temporal as against transcendental values, seems to me necessarily to stand, not only for ascertainable truth, but also for justice and gentleness, for kindness and compassion, for health and happiness, for life and love and loveliness.

Mr. Hannen Swaffer and Spiritualism

By H. CUTNER

FOR SOMETHING LIKE 34 YEARS, the "Pope of Fleet Street" (as Mr. Swaffer has been facetiously named) has been an active Spiritualist. The word "active" here has, of course, a number of reservations. Mr. Swaffer has spoken on the subject innumerable times, he has written about it, he has made a large number of claims, and the only evidence he has ever produced comes from a deal of voluble talk and writing. If words, words, and more words, constitute *evidence*, then Mr. Swaffer has won hands down.

Unfortunately, some of us are not at all convinced by mere assurances that certain things called "psychical phenomena" have ever happened. Nor are we staggered by big names. The "scientists" who have attempted to investigate Spiritualism and who have subsequently fallen for it have always appeared to me to be particularly ill-equipped for this kind of investigation. Harry Houdini, one of the greatest of all illusionists, always preferred a committee of scientists to stand by and see that there was no "trickery" in his famous illusions, rather than a committee of schoolboys. He bamboozled every scientist he could get to see him. The way he escaped from prison handcuffs supplied by the finest police forces in the world, or from prison cells, or from heavily locked and chained iron boxes, even made his own conjuring comrades gasp. If they could not explain how all this was done—how could the rather shrinking scientist, used perhaps to work only with test tubes and crucibles or geological specimens? The late Neville Maskelyne invented a number of famous tricks and illusions, and the way he did them has never been divulged. Here was a chance for our scientists—but while so many were eager to accept anything done by a medium as literally emanating from unspecified spooks, or from "spirit guides" with fantastic Indian or Arabic or Chinese names, they have always been quite helpless in discovering how Houdini or Maskelyne performed his tricks. If Mr. Swaffer knows how some illusions are done, it is only because someone told him. He could never have found out for himself. And, of course, when, let us say, Mr. M. Barbanell tells him that the "phenomena" came under the "strictest scientific control," I am quite sure he never tried to find out what this was. Everything that Mr. Barbanell or Mr. Fred Archer or any of the mediums they favour say was "strictly scientific," must be so—in spite of the fact that sometimes there is a slip-up, as in the case of Mr. Roy or Mrs. Duncan, the lady who once got nine months. If the medium is not found out—that is, if he or she is far too obscure to bother with, then the phenomena produced must be genuine.

Writing to our reader, Mr. Green, Mr. Swaffer says that in the debate the late Chapman Cohen had with Mr. Barbanell, "he was so badly beaten that in THE FREETHINKER, of which he was the Editor, he printed only his own speeches." I am afraid that here Mr. Swaffer's memory (or his spirit "guides") has badly let him down. The account of this debate was written by me, and I summarised *all* the speeches. But it will come as some astonishing news to those of us who remember C.C. in his prime that a Mr.

Barbanell could "beat" him. The truth is that this gentleman got the beating of his life; but only those who were there can say what really happened. C.C. found Mr. Barbanell about the easiest opponent with whom he ever crossed swords.

And this brings me to the way in which Mr. Swaffer can outshine anybody in pure, unadulterated boasting—outshine even Mr. Barbanell.

I cannot remember that he ever had a debate with an "anti"—but no doubt he can put me right on this. What I can repeat, however, are Mr. Swaffer's own words, and they are worth again putting on record:

Now telling other people the things which I have just begun to believe has become an ordinary event in my life. Very few jeer. And no one jeers twice. For I am a man of blunt speech and vigorous argument, and, thank Heaven, I have a gift of cynicism which I indulge at other people's expense, when they oppose me. My reply, always, is this: "I will debate the subject of Spiritualism with you in public, anywhere you like. You can choose your own chairman and, if you like, your own audience. If you do not accept this challenge, talk about something else, something you know about—jazz, for instance, or Shirley Kellogg.

Nothing can be fairer than that—but, alas, when Mr. Swaffer was approached to meet Chapman Cohen in debate a whiff of cold air encircled his feet, and there wasn't a medium anywhere nor a "spirit guide" who could dispel it. Mr. Swaffer suddenly found out that he was far too busy. Nothing would please him more than a debate, particularly with such an opponent as Chapman Cohen—but he was, oh dear, so very busy, and he had to decline.

But without the reputation so well deserved which C.C. acquired as a first-class debater, I hope that I can say that, as far as I have read Mr. Swaffer's pontifical pronouncements on Spiritualism, I found them only a dreary re-hash of secondhand nonsense, none of which he could possibly have sustained in a discussion with such a formidable debater as Chapman Cohen.

Mr. Swaffer told Mr. G. Green that when years ago, he "crowded the Bolton Town Hall," the Mayor "took the chair." So what? Most mayors are quite reputable citizens—but what qualifications have some for talking about Spiritualism, the Lord, and possibly Mr. Swaffer knows. Who else? In any case, a crowd would go to hear Mr. Swaffer just because he was a journalist, just as they would go to see a glamorous actress for her beauty, and not at all because she may have fallen for spooks.

Does Mr. Swaffer claim that the crowd or the Mayor proved the truth of Spiritualism?

For myself, after almost half a century of reading about Spiritualism, and taking some part in personal investigations, I can only affirm again in these columns that the Spiritualistic "survival" is just as silly as the late Judge Rutherford's "Millions now living will never die."

CORRESPONDENCE

MYTHS AND MEN

Mr. Cutner perpetrates various inaccuracies in his article, "The Most Authenticated Fact in History?"

To begin with, Samuel, who was not a "pagan god," was not resurrected but "conjured up" as a phantom or apparition. An insubstantial vision is not the same thing as a risen body. As Jesus is reported to have said: "A spirit hath not flesh and bones." (Luke XXIV. 39.)

Zoroaster, or Zarathustra, was not a god and is not regarded as such by his followers, the Parsis. He was an historical personage, the founder of Persian monotheism, which, superseded by Islam in its country of origin, survives at the present time as a small sect in India.

Gautama the Buddha, despite the marvels and legends about him, was also an historical personage who never claimed divine honours. Zoroaster and Buddha, therefore, hardly rank as pagan gods.

S. W. BROOKS.

JESUS UNWORTHY OF DU CANN

Mr. Du Cann cannot be serious, and I consider him one of the best of satirists. Jesus, if he ever lived, never wrote a book, never added anything to science or art, never spoke a word that could be indisputably understood, and has caused sufficient blood to be shed as would float a fleet. Religious fanatics have claimed him to be almost everything.

Once, when sitting on the sands at Torquay during the Tariff Reform movement, a religious crank approached me with a pamphlet entitled "Was Jesus a Tariff Reformer?" The Socialist Labour Party have claimed him as a Socialist, the Tories as a Tory, and I should be glad if Mr. Du Cann and Mr. Cutner would give Jesus a rest, and deal with more important matters at home. It is said that he could turn water into wine, make invisible bridges over the water, cure all diseases, etc., etc., and only a selfish scoundrel would withhold his secret remedies. Think what Britain could save today, in the medical services. What would we think of a scientist who could make the blind see, and yet died without giving that knowledge to the world?

PAUL VARNEY.

THE ISLAMIC VIEW OF JESUS

From the Islamic point of view, Jesus Christ never died on the Cross, nor was he Resurrected. He lived a normal span of life, and died as a human being, and was buried in the grove at Srinagar, Kashmir, Asia. His message to the twelve lost tribes of Israelites, viz., the Pathens and Kashmiries, is well known to the history. His ministry to the Israelites of Palestine ended there in the early 40's, and he escaped for life to preach his mission to the twelve lost tribes of Israel, which inhabited the eastern country, well known as Afghanistan, and the Frontier Province, as well as the Kashmir State. He lived amongst them to the age of about 120 years, and had a married life, and died at Srinagar, where he lies for eternal rest.

K. B. GHULAM RABBANI KHAN,
Imam of the Shah Jehan Mosque.

Points from Letters

Sunday Observance Laws are here to stay a little longer. 1677 and all that! It is still illegal to row a boat or sell ice-cream here on the Sabbath. How incredibly asinine is the law! Most M.P.s who could have done something to remedy this absurd situation stayed away from the House the other week. Could this be due to fear of religious pressure groups?—C. H. HAMMERSLEY.

Most people, I find, don't think—they accept given premises and their "thought" then remains static.—J. MELMAN.

Papal power was built up, not by a "divine" force, but by a pitifully human series of forgeries and pious frauds perpetrated in an age of deep ignorance.—S. MCNAIR.

A simple retort to "Where are the Dead?" is "Where are the Unborn?"—E. W. SMITH.

NOTABLE PAMPHLETS: *St. George and the Dragon* by F. A. Ridley, price 1d.; *Social Catholicism* by F. A. Ridley, price 1d.; *The Religious Revival* by G. H. Taylor, price 1d.; *BBC, ITA and Atheism* by Colin McCall, price 3d.; *Problems of Church and State* by F. A. Ridley, price 4d.; *France and the Vatican* by F. A. Ridley, price 4d. The six pamphlets 1/-, including postage, from The Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

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